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SUBJECT: KURDISH LEADERS DISCUSS PESHMERGA, PKK WITH
AMBASSADOR

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Daniel V. Speckhard for Reasons 1.4 (b)
) and (d).

11. (S) SUMMARY: In a series of brief asides at the 60th anniversary celebration of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in Erbil on August 16, the Ambassador discussed plans to integrate the KDP and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) Peshmerga forces into a single, unified structure and the continuing conflict with Turkey over the PKK. According to President Talabani, the Government of Turkey approached him quietly about plans to send Turkish Foreign Minister Gul to meet with Kurdistan Regional Government President Masud Barzani on a way forward to resolve the situation with the PKK in northern Iraq. END SUMMARY.

Plan to Merge the Peshmerga?

12. (C) At the 60th anniversary celebration in Erbil of the founding of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) on August 16, the Ambassador spoke with both President Jalal Talabani and KRG President Masud Barzani about the need to move forward with integrating the KDP and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) Peshmerga forces. Talabani and Barzani agreed, and claimed that by the end of August they intend to present a plan to integrate the Peshmerga forces under a single command, and make this single Peshmerga force independent of the two parties' control. The two presidents asked the Ambassador for assistance implementing this plan and with training for the unified Peshmerga, which would become the "regional guard force."

13. (C) Talabani and Barzani indicated that they had not discussed with the Government of Iraq (GOI) the planned integration of the Peshmerga units or negotiated a mutually acceptable number for the regional defense force. The Kurdish leaders initially suggested that roughly 70,000 Peshmerga would be necessary, but the Ambassador noted that it seemed very high for a regional defense force that would be connected to the national security structure.

Turks Bypassing Baghdad on PKK?

14. (S) In a separate conversation on August 16, Talabani informed the Ambassador that the Turkish Ambassador to Iraq told Talabani privately that Ankara was planning to send Turkish Foreign Minister Gul to Erbil to meet with Barzani on resolving the PKK issue. According to Talabani, the PKK could be persuaded to accept a unilateral ceasefire if the leader of the legitimate Kurdish party in Turkey, Dr. Ahmad Turk, was allowed to meet with jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in person. According to Talabani, it was the Turkish military that was blocking this request.

